

# The Joliet Blues

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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The Blues Brothers has to be one of the most peculiar movie license tie-in games I've covered so far in that it *wasn't* actually based on the movie of the same name. Huh? Well exactly. I'd imagine it would have been more affordable (and far less complicated) to buy the rights to produce a game vaguely inspired by the American blues and soul revivalist band *characters* devised by comedians Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi in 1978 for a Saturday Night Live musical sketch, rather than the 1980 John Landis comedy musical *movie* also starring the same duo, so that's precisely what French developers Titus chose to do.

"It's 106 miles to Chicago, we got a full tank of gas, half a pack of cigarettes, it's dark and we're wearing sunglasses. Hit it."



The result was a quick-paced, zany action-platformer released simultaneously in 1991 for the Amiga, Amstrad CPC, Atari ST, Commodore 64, and MS-DOS, with versions for the NES and Game Boy following a year later. As the game's key components weren't obliged to run parallel with those of the movie, no cars were harmed during its production... probably leading the 103 that were wrecked during filming to wish they'd signed their contract with Titus and not Universal! Then again, had they played it safe, they'd never have been able to brag to their pitstop chums about being part of a world record that held steady for a further two years following the release of the movie! Wow, two paragraphs in and I've already descended into pondering the aspirations of sentient racing cars. I feel I'm breaking records of my own here.

Contractual stipulations aside, the twain *did* meet on a rodeo load of occasions. There are so many correlations between the two it hardly matters whether the game is more concerned with The Blues Brothers' core concepts and

stagecraft, or the specific plot of the movie, unless you happen to be a die-hard fan of one or the other or both, which can't have applied to *that* many kids growing up in the early 90s, can it? They would have been too young to remember much about the movie or the era it alludes to. I remember for a long while believing the Blues Brothers were a comedy spoof of a serious jazz band also called the Blues Brothers. It wasn't until much later I realised that they *were* that band... in a sense, kind of.

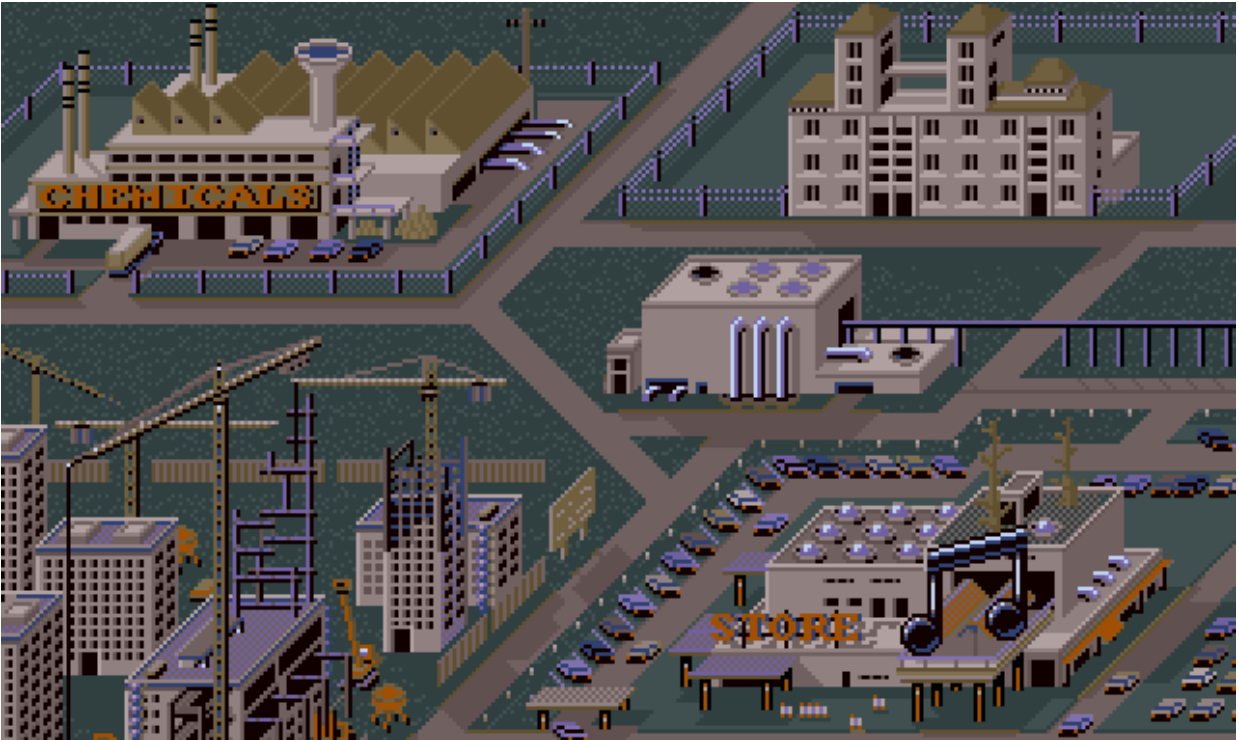
In the game both brothers - 'Joliet' Jake and Elwood Blues - have just been released from the Calumet County Penitentiary to discover that their instruments have been swiped by the Chicago sheriff's department to scupper their chances of a repeat performance. You see, the game begins where the movie ends; with the brothers regaling a captive audience with their interpretation of Elvis's timeless 'Jailhouse Rock' international no. 1 hit, culminating in a riot that doesn't go down too well with the prison guards.

This is the first juncture at which it deviates from the movie - on the silver screen it's just Jake who has been incarcerated and released where we join the story, and he's been holed up in the Joliet Correctional Facility where he's spent the previous three years for holding up a gas station at gunpoint.

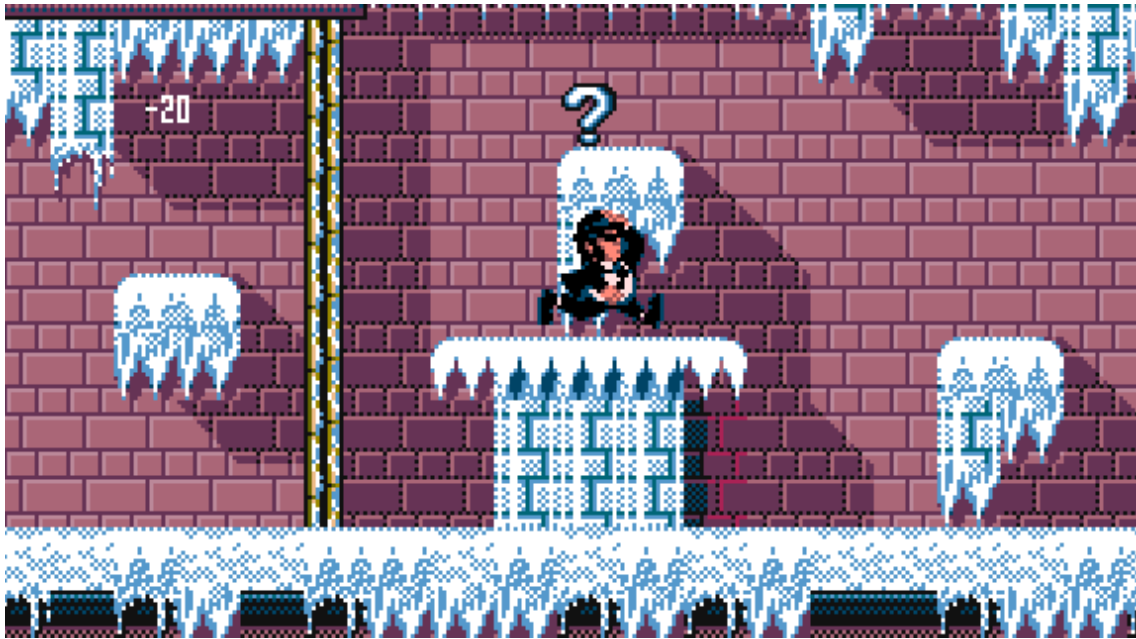
Over on the ickie 14" bedroom TV screen it's your task to track down a concert permit, amplifier, a guitar, microphone, and a "they're back" concert poster to allow you to perform at the party gig to end them all. There's one item to locate per level, and it must be collected before you can proceed to the exit of each of the five areas you advance through in a linear fashion.

Permits get a brief mention in the movie, though they're not something Jake and Elwood find themselves chasing in order to perform. Hardly rock 'n' roll now is it? Rather Jake pretends

to be 'Jacob Stein' representing the 'American Federation of Musicians Union, Local 200' as part of a ruse to dodge being discovered as country and western imposters and scarper without paying a \$100 beer tab.



This being a platformer, the levels are split across various environmentally disparate scenarios; in this case, a department store, the chemical factory where Elwood works in the movie (that midway switches to a slippery ice stage for no apparent reason), a sewer located deep beneath a subway full of hidden caves and tunnels, the state penitentiary, and finally a construction site leading to the concert hall where you'll be performing. Located somewhere within each is a single restart checkpoint that will help you avoid having to retrace your steps all the way back from square one.



Picture a wavy transition flip back to Hollywoodland where Elwood is picking up Jake from the prison gates in the Mount Prospect former cop car Bluesmobile. Fulfilling a promise to "visit the penguin" they jump a drawbridge and head off to meet Sister Mary Stigmata who runs the Catholic orphanage where they were brought up. In doing so they discover that the charity is under threat from closure unless she can conjure up at short notice the \$5000 owed in property taxes. Cue the impetus for a band reunion fundraiser and all the inevitably hare-brained misadventures that ensue along the way.



Whatever obstacles seek to put the brakes on their crusade, *nothing* can stop them; they're "on a mission from God" as we're reminded at every opportunity. By 'obstacles', we're not talking about a flat tyre or a bit of man flu. How about jilted bride Carrie Fisher hellbent on revenge that revolves around burning Jake to a cinder with a flamethrower, or turning him into a human colander by taking potshots at him with an M16 rifle? Elwood's middle name is collateral damage it would seem. Not that being hounded by the police to stand trial for 172 traffic violations is going to bring him any closer to saving the orphanage either.





"You contemptible pig! I remained celibate for you. I stood in the back of a cathedral, waiting, in celibacy, for you, with three hundred friends and relatives in attendance. My uncle hired the best Romanian caterers in the state. To obtain the seven limousines for the wedding party, my father used up his last favor with Mad Pete Trullo. So for me, for my mother, my grandmother, my father, my uncle, and for the common good, I must now kill you, and your brother."

Oh, and the Illinois Neo-Nazi Party are gunning for them too. That's what happens when you run lunatics off the road and make yourselves traceable.

Moments before Carrie shows up as 'Mystery Woman' schlepping about a proton pack full of flammable fuel, Elwood and Jake are seen in a phone booth making a call to their former talent agent, Maury Sline, in an effort to line up a gig at the Palace Hotel Ballroom. It being an off the cuff gamble it's not something that has been discussed and so Elwood asks Jake, "who you gonna call?". Obviously this became the tagline for the 1984 movie Ghostbusters starring and co-written by Dan Aykroyd.





Note there's an entire accompanying band involved (guitarist, keyboardist, trombonist, bassist, trumpeter, drummer, and rhythm guitarist) in the big-screen musical adaptation, whereas in the game you're a duet, and only then if you choose the two-player option. If you complete the game on your lonesome, your reward is to perform as a solo artist, which strikes me as a bit sad given that 'brothers' kind of suggests you should at least play as a double act. Well if

John Belushi at the age of only 33 hadn't blown his own brains out with a heroin-cocaine 'speedball' cocktail in 1982 anyway. Had he still been around in 1984 he would have played Dr Peter Venkman in Ghostbusters alongside writer and co-star, Dan Aykroyd. Such a waste. No offence, Bill, of course.

John's brother Jim was hoped to star in the 1998 sequel, Blues Brothers 2000, as brother Zee Blues, though wasn't available due to other filming commitments. This time it's Elwood who is being released from prison determined to turn his life around, only not with the help of Jake as much like in real life he has passed away. Instead, helping him reform the band is Mack McTeer, the barkeep soulman played by John Goodman.

A pixelated warp transition later and we segue back to the joystick jockeying japes of the Amiga incarnation. The two-player option is regrettably the game's most significant flaw in that the camera's focus tracks player 1 regardless of what player 2 might be doing. If he fails to keep up, he simply drops off-screen and out of sight, leaving you to guess what affects your commands are potentially having. To make any progress you must work as a team, sticking closely together and backtracking as and when necessary to bring your partner back into view. "He ain't heavyyyyyy, he's my brotheeeeeeeer..."



I suppose it saved Titus programming a proper two-player co-op mechanic, but it's not very satisfying for the punters who forked out £25 for what amounts to a shoddy, unfinished game. The way it normally works is you get nudged back on screen by an overly eager partner if possible (assuming nothing is obstructing your path), your partner is prevented from scrolling the screen forwards if you're lagging behind, or you take some kind of penalty hit if you fall beyond the scope of the current view. Anything else and it's classed as a bug.

Early previews reveal that the possibility of coding the provision for RS232 hookup support was considered during development, which would have allowed players to join their Amigas together via a cable and presumably view separate playfields on independent monitors. Obviously the concept

never came to pass because what we had to contend with instead was the bodged 'solution' discussed above.

Analogously to the studio's follow-up platformer - Titus the Fox - that arrived a year later, Jake and Elwood can only take out enemies by picking up and hurling individual projectiles such as crates. I say 'such as' except that's *all* they deploy as weapons in this first outing - it's surprising how much more adventurous you become when you climb into a fox outfit. In their fancy dress suits they'll pick up anything *including* enemy sprites while they flounder in thin air to find their footing.





In the Blues Brothers projectiles are disposable so must be used sparingly, and only against foes that pose a real threat, whereas with the Fox, certain chuckables will bounce back or travel so far before coming to rest allowing you to recycle them. Mechanically, however, the manoeuvre is identical - press fire to hoist an item over your head, and tap fire again to pelt it horizontally across the landscape.

This isn't the only cunning similarity you'll notice - the game engine, trundling and crawling animation, and crazy pace have clearly been rehashed wholesale, and even some of the enemies put in a cameo appearance. If it ain't broke, tart it up a bit and re-release it with a new name and theme! It's not as if it was the first time Titus pulled a Moktar.

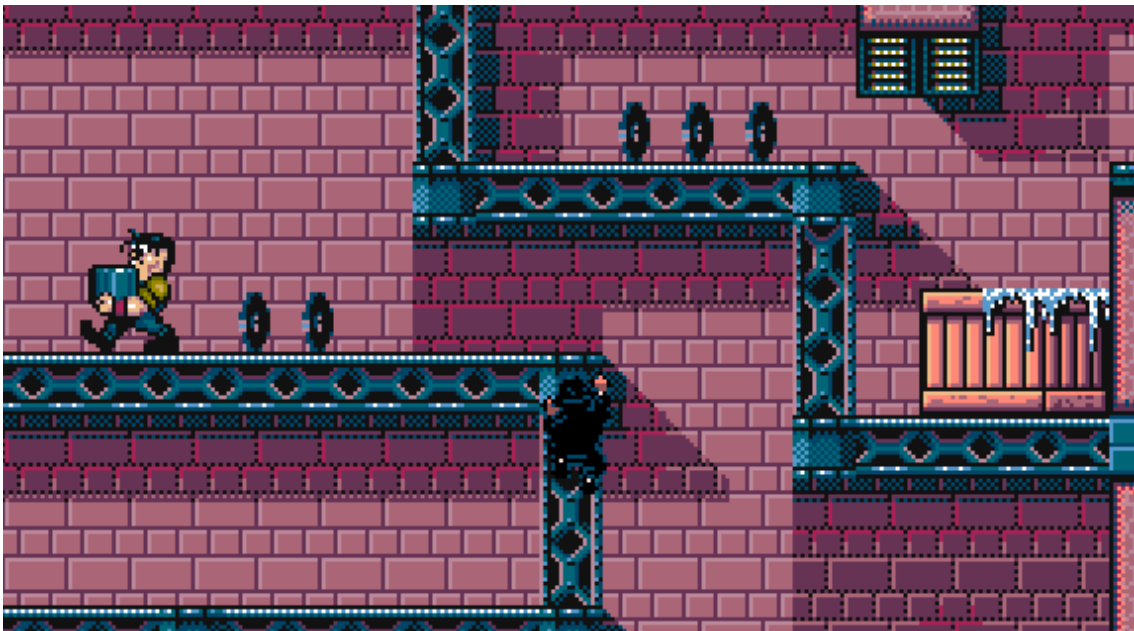
**"YES! YES! JESUS H. TAP-DANCING CHRIST... I HAVE SEEN THE LIGHT!"**

Blues Brothers was coded on the PC, while the graphics were produced in Deluxe Paint; the combined effort of Vincent Berthelot, Jean Michel Masson, and Olivier Calladout, none of

whom - with the exception of the musician mentioned earlier - went on to work on Titus the Fox despite the glaring similarities.

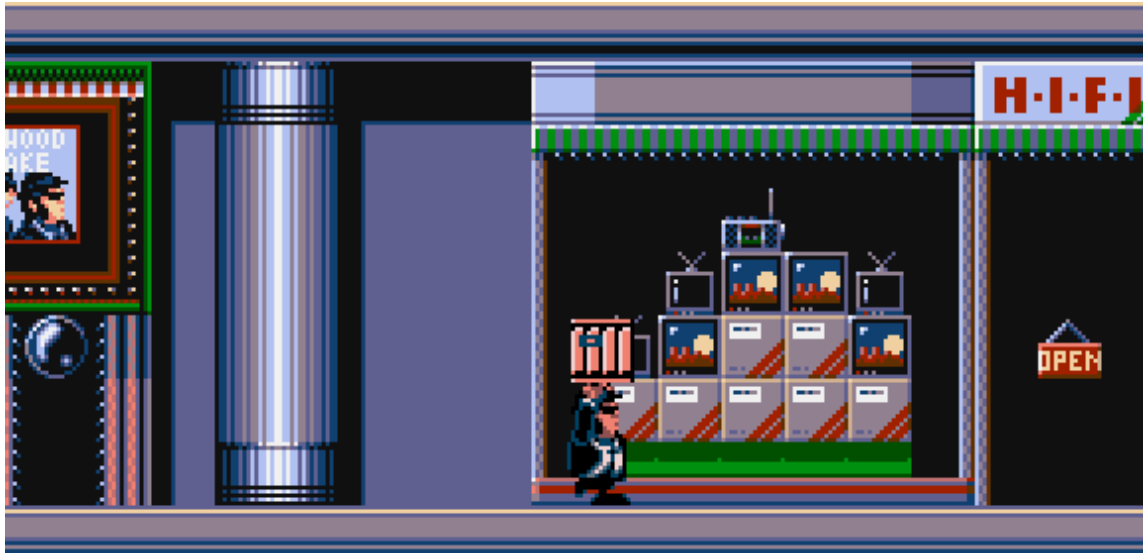
"Our lady of blessed acceleration don't fail me now!"

You begin your quest with three lives and three hit points represented by hearts, though more can be earned up to a maximum of five as in the Addams Family. Extra lives can be accumulated in a number of ways: by collecting pork pie hats and shades, or as a reward for every 100 records found, though be aware that 50 are deducted for every broken one accidentally stumbled into.



Your first objective is to find a guitar, and that, strangely enough, is waiting for you in the music store, corresponding to the movie equivalent where the real live genuine soul-trader Ray Charles works, who treats us to an "electric piano" singalong rendition of 'Shake Your Tail Feather'. It's these transcendent, stand-out moments that allow you to appreciate the spectacle even if the comedy isn't to your taste. Likewise, it's fun to play spot the musical/pop culture

celebrity cameo. Take your pick from James Brown, Cab Calloway, Aretha Franklin, Henry Gibson, Thomas 'Bones' Malone, Willie 'Too Big' Hall, Steve Cropper, Donald 'Duck' Dunn, Murphy 'Murph' Dunne, Alan Rubin, 'Blue Lou' Marini, Matt 'Guitar' Murphy, Twiggy, Frank Oz, John Lee Hooker, Mr. T, Chaka Khan, and Steven Spielberg.



I can't say I observed any money changing hands for the guitar in pixel-land. At least in the movie the instruments are purchased with an IOU, which is eventually reimbursed when you hit the big time and you're feeling flush. I fear our 16-bit selves could end up right back in the slammer at this rate!

An Amiga-ised embodiment of the Dixie Square Mall features in the game, though sadly you don't get to *drive* through it like Dan and John; one of the rapidly mounting roll call of reasons for which the police would like to baton their skulls to a pulp. I mean try them by the book to the full extent of the fair and balanced judicial system of course. I always get those two confuddled.

"Police Dispatcher: Use of unnecessary violence in the apprehension of the Blues Brothers HAS been approved."





Anyone who can explain why there are two massive shark-infested water tanks installed in the game's department store must have been watching a different cut of the movie to me... the movie the game isn't remotely based upon let's not forget.

Neither of you are built like superheroes so take damage points whenever you plummet from elevated platforms. This can be negated by using an umbrella to glide to safety, or on the contrary, *ascend* to higher ground via helium balloons. At one point, gravity-defying bee costumes inspired by James Belushi's 'One Flew Over the Hornet's Nest' sketch from Saturday Night Live were to be incorporated, though this buzzin' power-up doesn't appear to have transpired.



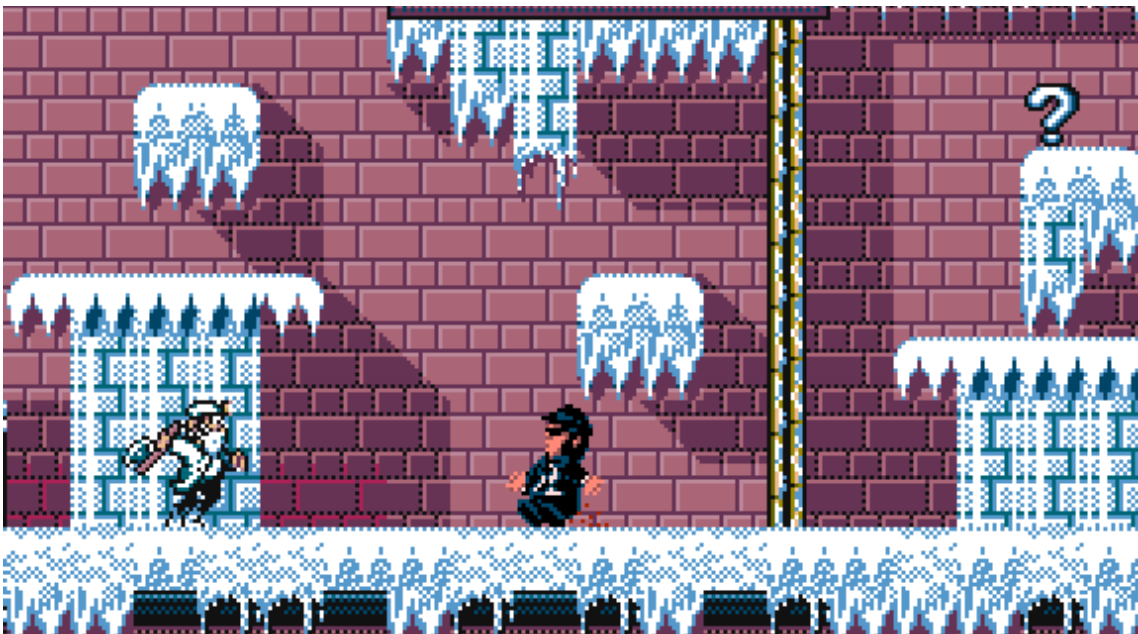
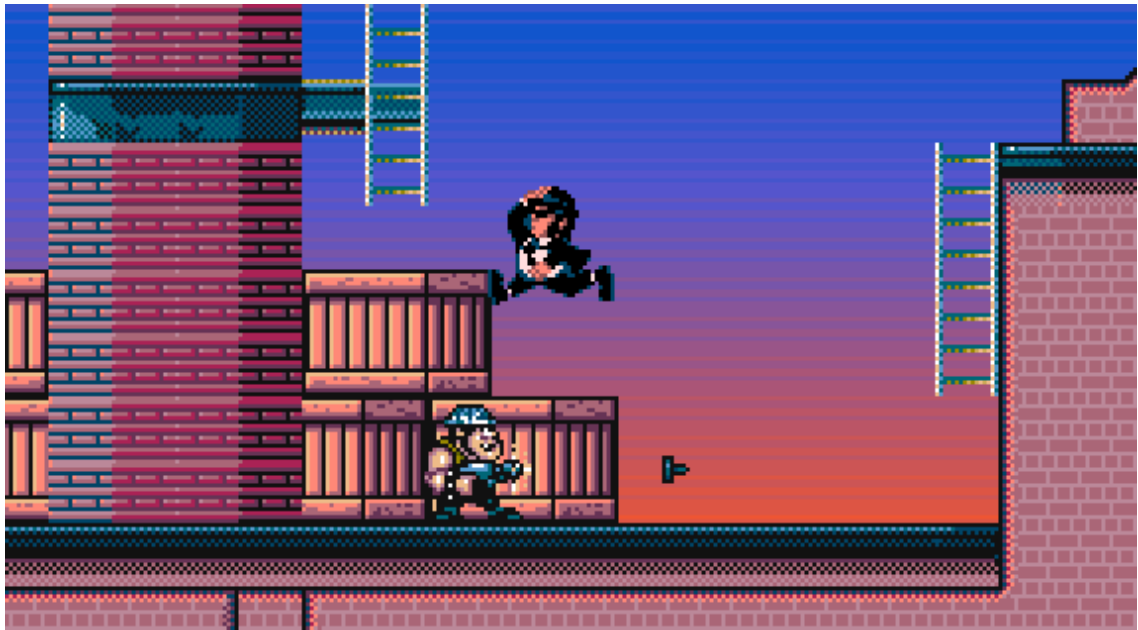
Other useful ground-gaining gimmickry includes springs and prison beds - this is about as puzzley as it's going to get so don't expect any conundrums aside from those involving bouncing on or throwing something or other. It's action-orientated, tail-feather shaking all the way as you scale and shimmy across wire fences, swim, run and dance your way through 300 ludicrous pastiche screens, tackling 25 wacky baddies fresh from the random adversary generator.

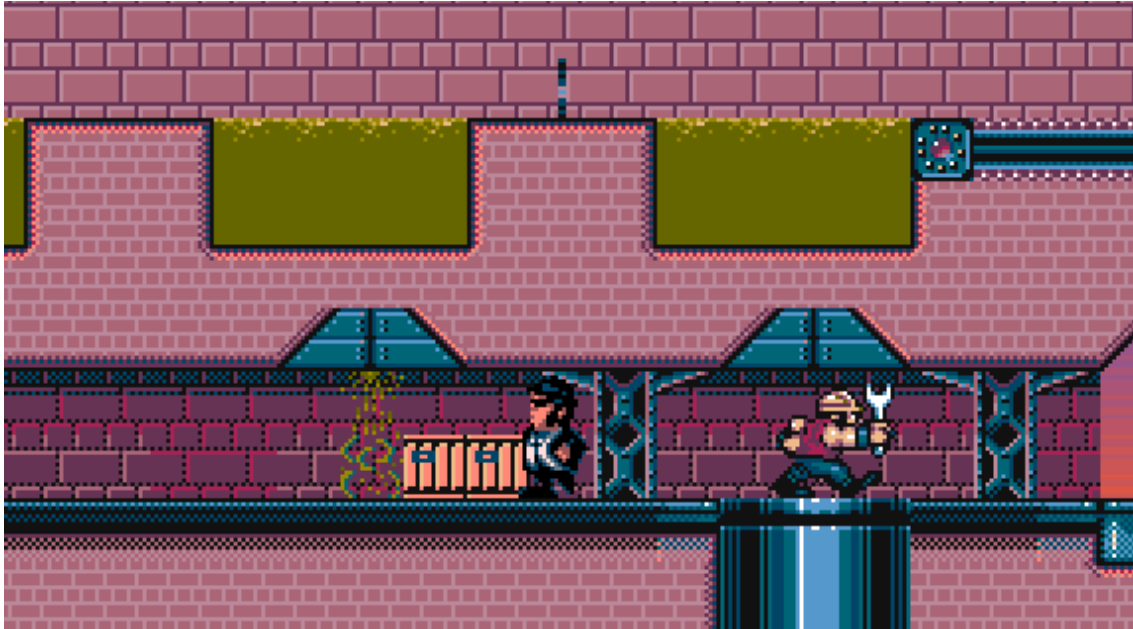


There's Hermann the syringe launcher who went on to become the dart-throwing tramp in Titus the Fox, 50s throwback 'banana spit' teddy boys, an axe-wielding surgeon, hard-hatted workmen tooled up (literally) with spanners or nail guns, enormous rats, and meat-head prisoners sporting stripey PJs. I'm only pausing for breath.

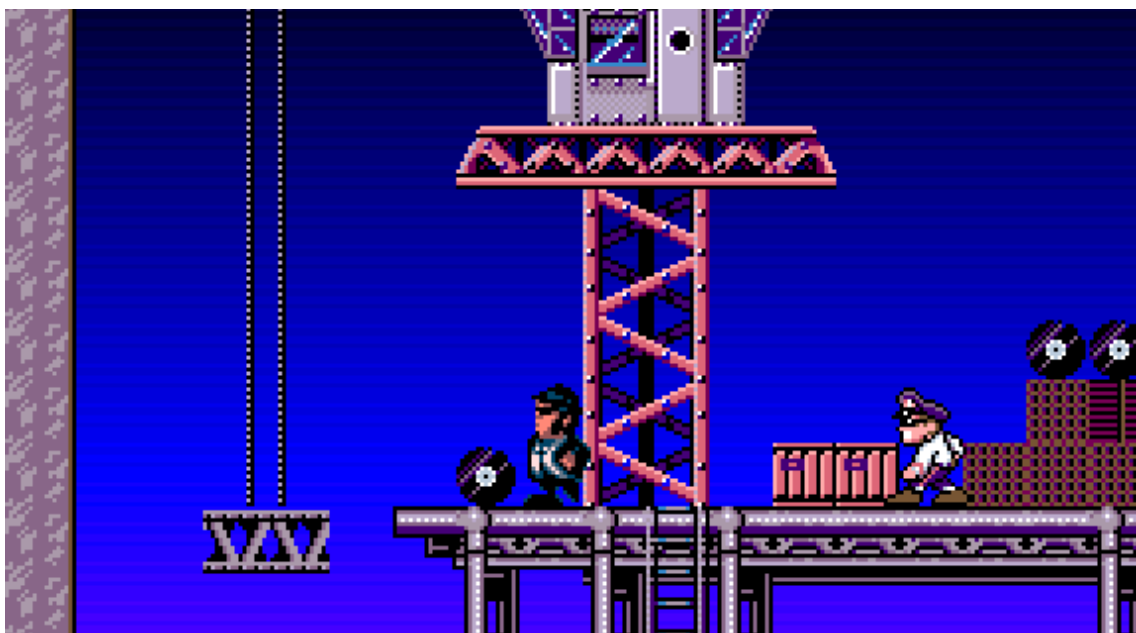




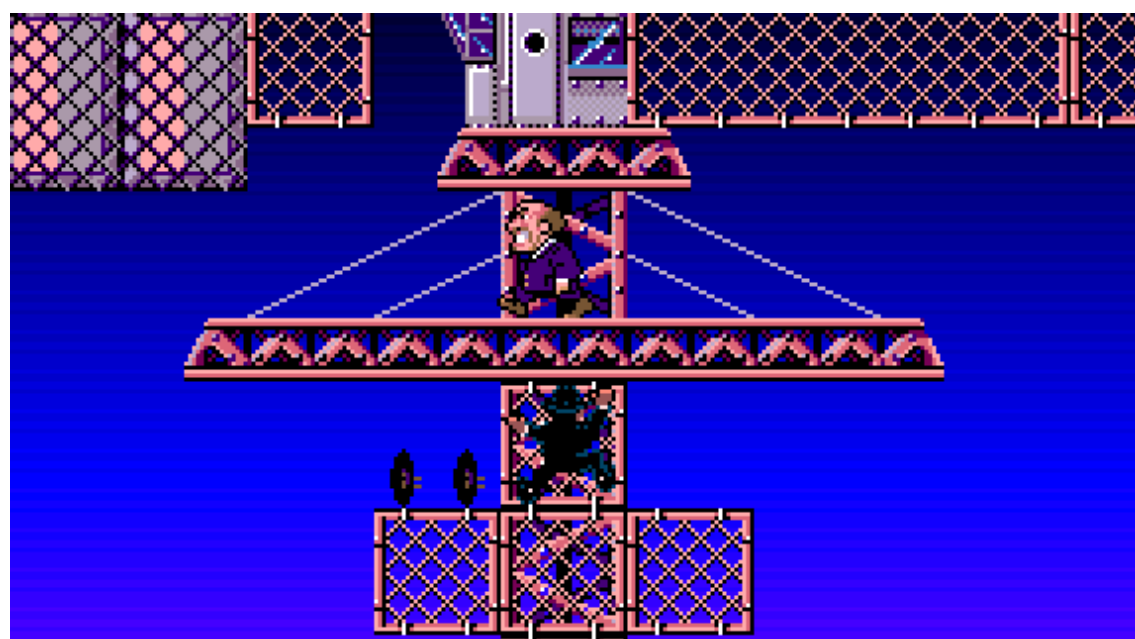
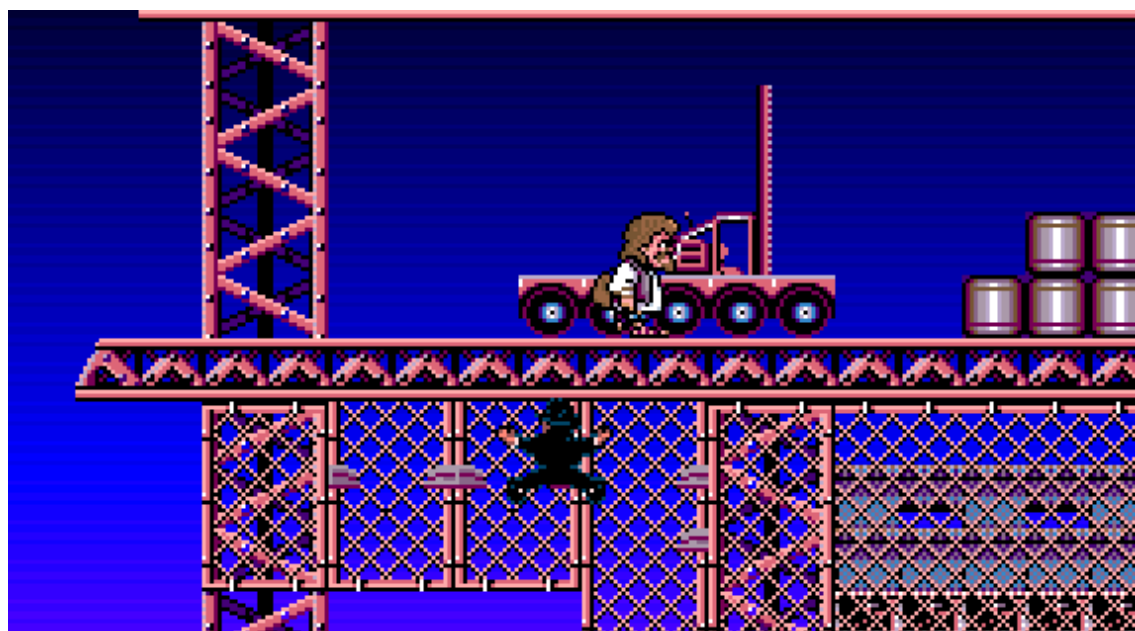


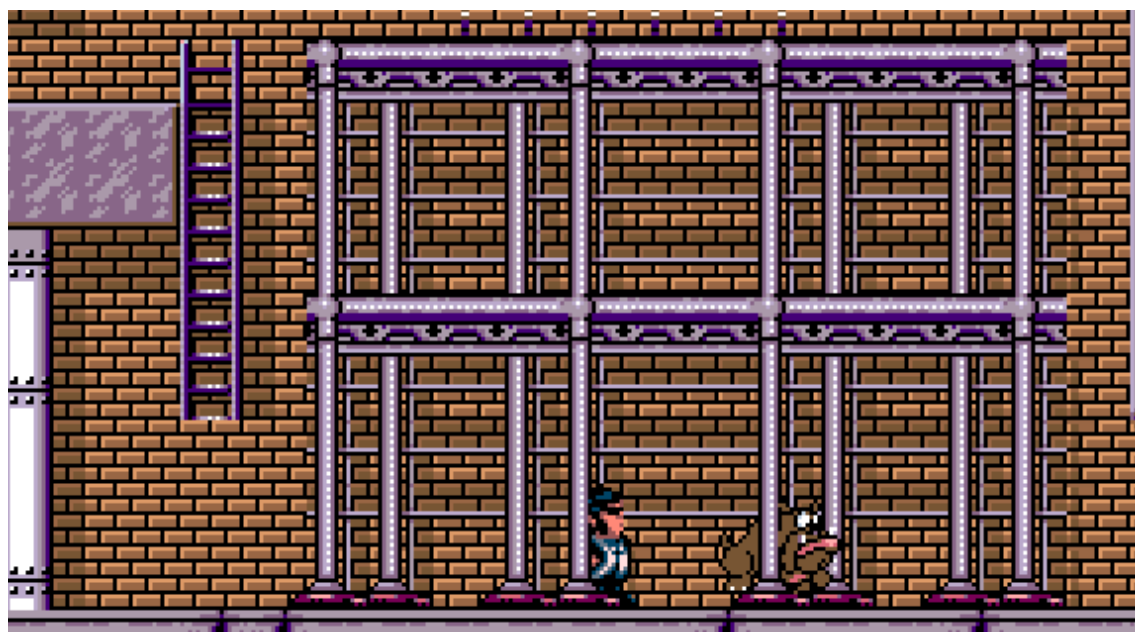


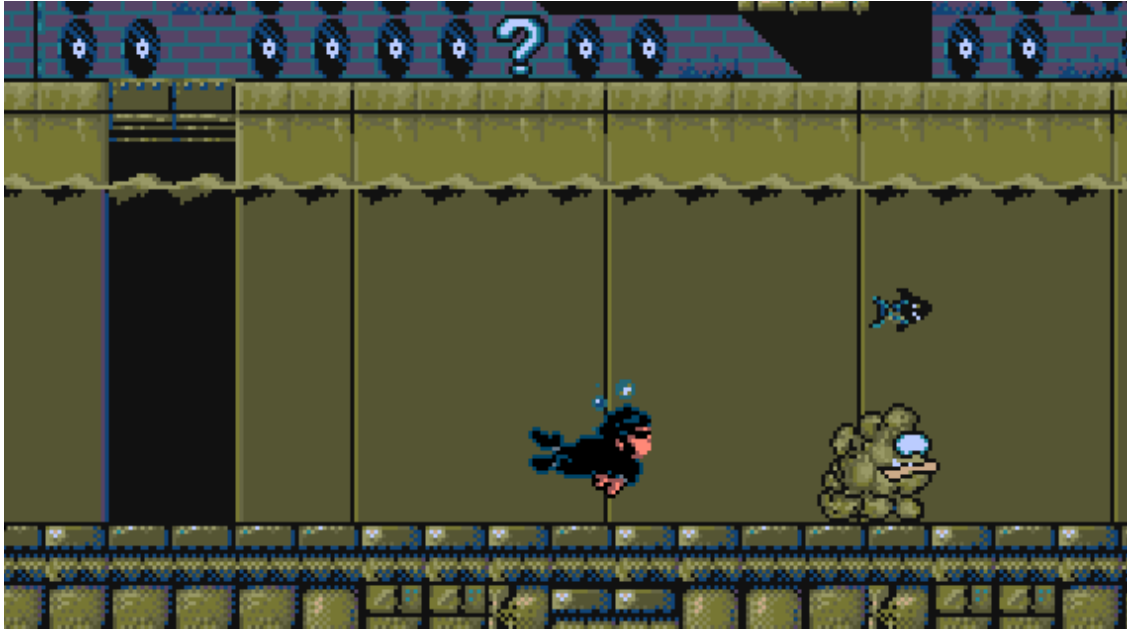
Then we've got piranhas and mutant 'Blobsons' in the sewer, businessmen and sandled-up escapees from Nazareth who look a bit like Rolf Harris (though who appear to be based on band member Donald 'Duck' Dunn from the movie) and roam about the girders on the building site level along with security guards, and bulldogs straight from Tom and Jerry who make a comeback in Titus the Fox.





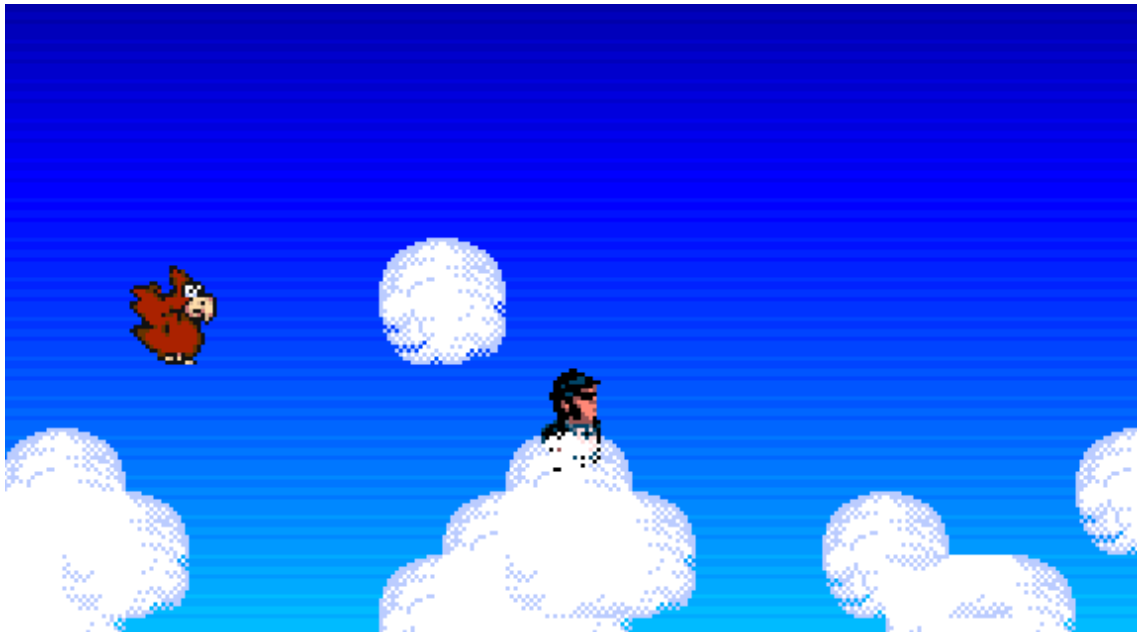






Elsewhere you'll face gardeners armed with rakes and grannies hooning about in trollies, plate-lobbing waitresses, yokels brandishing stabby pitchforks, airborne birds who unleash eggs, and riot police.







Each of the characters is diligently impelled with up to 40 frames of animation, bringing them to life both comically and convincingly. This is evident right from the opening player selection screen where the spotlighted character dances his heart out, while the player in the shade kicks back with the newspaper. This, much like the in-game dancing bonus, rendering you momentarily immobile and thus vulnerable to attack, and the endearing way Jake grasps onto his precious hat whenever he executes a particularly athletic jump, serve no real function aside from demonstrating the animator's tenacious dedication to his craft. It's above and beyond the call of duty and doesn't go unnoticed. What's more, Jake and Elwood actually resemble their namesakes; a novelty less common than you'd expect where licensed games are concerned, usually owing to contractual agreements rather than the talent of the artists.



It seems that contrary to Bob's Country Bunker wisdom there are more than "both kinds" of music, "country *and* western", and it's the superb acoustics that really makes Blues Brothers shine. Titus's game soundtrack is composed of accurate, recognisable reproductions of the Blues Brothers' back catalogue courtesy of Christophe Fevrie. Full marks must go to the developers for exploiting the license to full effect there. Peter Gunn's main theme tune playing over the first level, and 'Everybody Needs Somebody' accompanying level two has to be the cream of the crop. The remaining tracks - '(I Got Everything I Need) Almost' and 'Shot Gun Blues' - aren't quite so hum-along-to-able, though still worthy additions taken from the movie soundtrack the game isn't at all based on.

Another crucial element Titus got spot-on is the controls. They're fluid, logical, with not too much inertia, and can be understood in seconds. Furthermore, unlike Special FX's Hudson Hawk, released almost in tandem, it features a

manipulable jump arc. No wonder so little changed when the engine was re(fox)skinned in 1992.

This and the slick presentation led to a universal thumbs up from the magazine critics, at least upon first release. CU Amiga later had a change of heart, marking the budget re-issue down to 52%, though that *was* late in 1994 by which time we'd seen dozens of better platformers and the genre had gone a tad stale.

What impressed Amiga Action was the overall atmosphere engendered by the charismatic duo and the competent translation of their art to the home computer. They scored Blues Brothers 86% concluding, "This stands as one of the most fun conversions to date. A tribute to the boys, platform entertainment, and an illustration of how movie conversions should be produced: with care and quality".





Zero highlighted that the game isn't exactly the most epic of platformers (one YouTube longplay lasts only 23 minutes) - and adding insult to injury - reveals everything on offer upfront in the manual, leaving little to anticipate. A lack of variety and the wonky two-player mode also fell under scrutiny, yet they still enjoyed it enough to award a respectable 86% grade, winding up with the largely positive remarks, "...in one player mode, The Blues Brothers is the dog's you-know-whats - possibly slightly marred by a lack of things to do."

An awkward two-player mechanic was also noted by The One, yet glossed over in favour of the absorbing playability factor. 91% was the final verdict - "The Blues Brothers is an excellent product, no matter who you are or what you do to live, thrive and survive."

It was the intricately detailed animation and exquisite music that swung it for CU Amiga. They seemed the game worthy of an 87% bottom line and their coveted Screenstar badge of honour.

"Fans of The Blues Brothers, and even those who have never watched the movie or listened to their records, will definitely get a kick out of this game. One of the best platform romps on the Amiga for a long, long time."

Although it may sound like the Belushi speedball talking today, pre-Addams Family, Amiga Power were possibly on the money with their claim that, "The Blues Brothers is without a shadow of a doubt the finest character license game ever seen on the Amiga". Still they erred on the side of caution with a slightly reserved 87% reckoning, albeit not in the parting treatise.

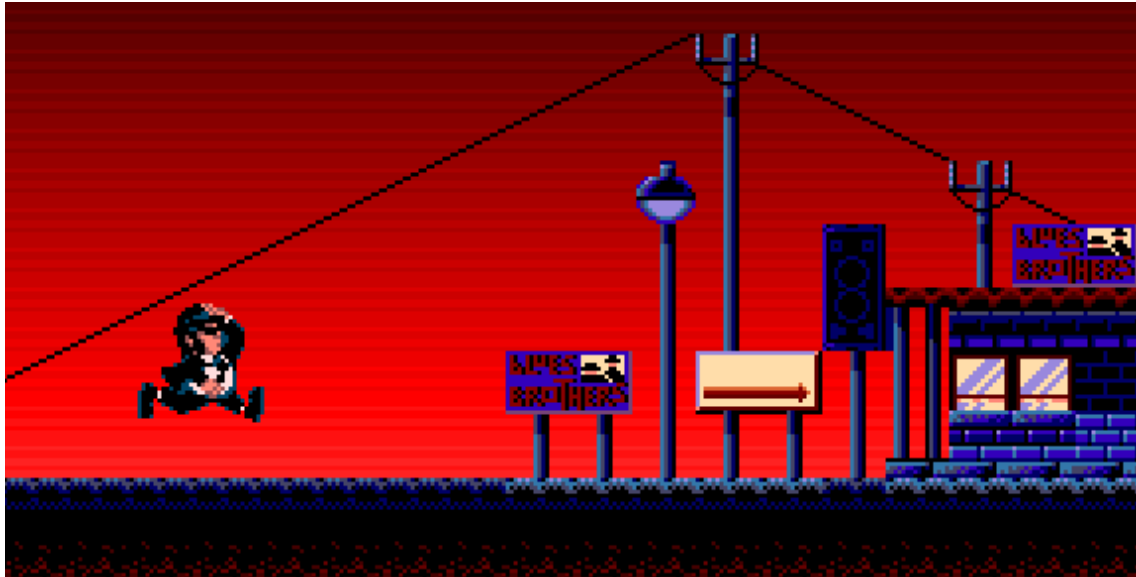
"Sparkling piece of console-style action that's excellent in everything it does. Don't let the Titus name put you off, they've finally come good. Fun, fun, fun."

Amiga Format's adjudication drew to a close with an 86% mark, and we can be sure they experienced Blues Brothers in its entirety seeing as they printed a screenshot of the final sequence, demonstrating that (a) it's either so easy they reached the end while putting it through its paces for review purposes, or (b) they cheated. Either way, it was highly unusual for a review to include the ultimate spoiler unless it related to the budget re-release edition.

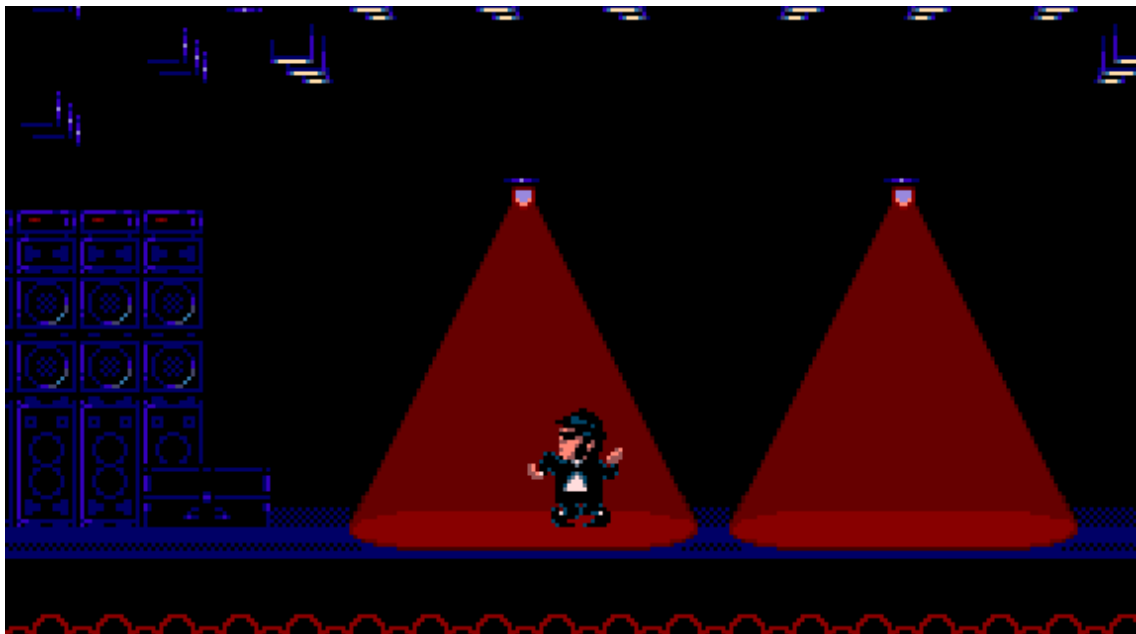
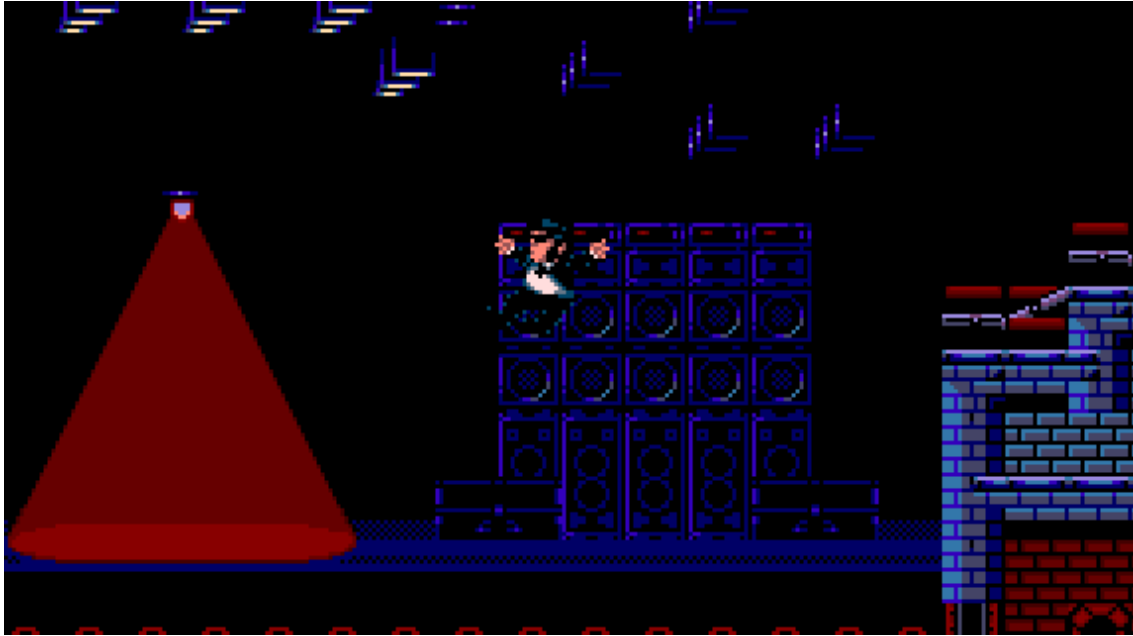
"You've seen the movie, bought the soundtrack and been to the fancy-dress party. Now play the game?"

I'm not entirely sure if that was a question for the readers, or themselves. Amiga Format *did* give Blues Brothers a glowing reference so you'd hope the former. Even so I get the

impression looking back that had the license not been attached, Titus's - let's face it - pretty pedestrian platformer wouldn't have received anything like as much attention from the Amiga community, who to be fair had seen it all before by this stage.



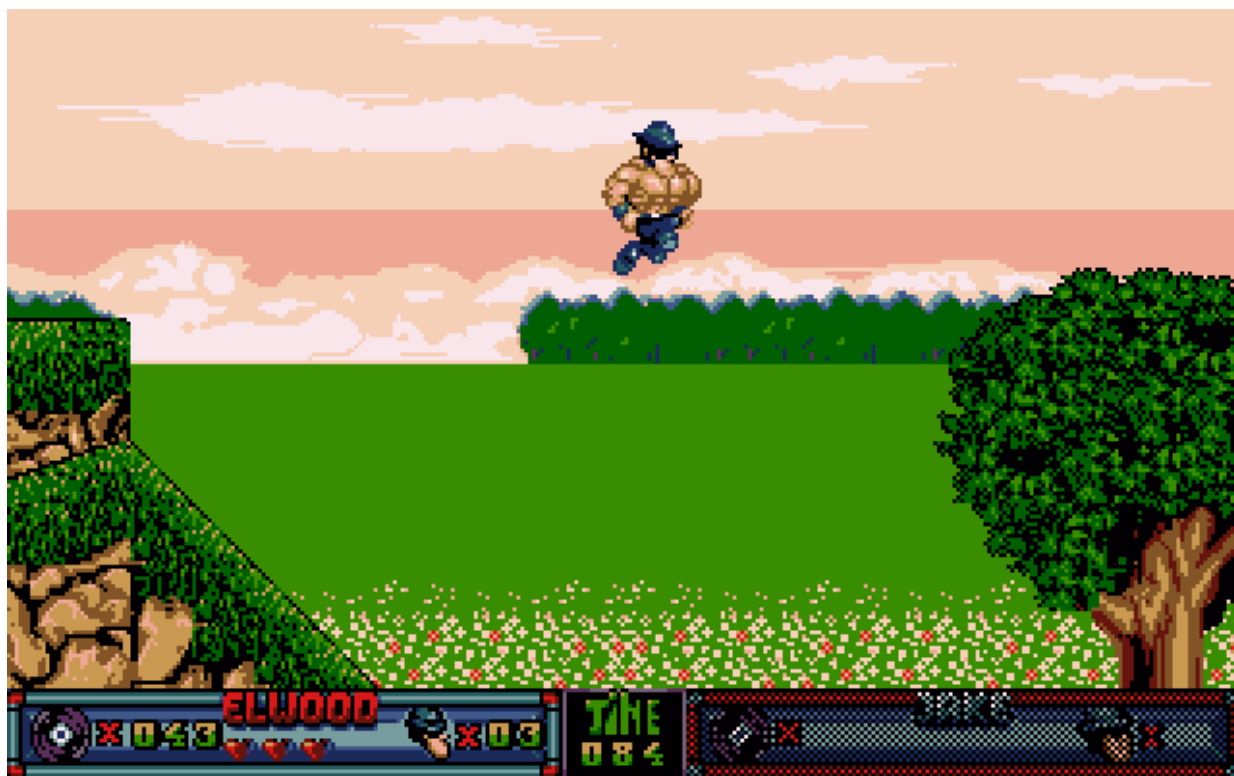
Our dalliance with fame and adoration concludes upon reaching the gig venue's concert stage and dancing (though not singing or playing any instruments!) for a static audience composed of nothing more than a single colour outline - and the crowd go... *mild*. All that remains to be done is stake your claim on the high score table, and try not to end up in the clink again any time soon. That pretty much sums up the experience... underwhelming. Subtract the eccentric humour and catchy music and all you're really left with is... oh, I don't know, Beau Jolly? It certainly didn't pose much of a threat in the charts, making its only appearance in Amiga Power's Christmas Gallup Top 100 rundown as reported in their February 1992 issue where it limped in at number 72.



A sequel known as 'The Blues Brothers: Jukebox Adventure' also from Titus was reviewed in Amiga Joker in April 1994 receiving a mediocre score of 71%, though was never actually released. It *did, however*, emerge for the DOS, Game Boy and SNES platforms in 1993 to a mixed reception.



It's familiar territory, only less Blues Brothery and more Ronald McDondaldy with a kiddy console vibe, mixed with Bananaman. Knowing his history with drugs, perhaps the less said about John Belushi 'riding the dragon' the better! Spike/Butch from the Tom and Jerry cartoons discovered the Marrakech climate wasn't for him and returns to Chicago to join the off-the-wall cast. Am I missing the Titus-bulldog connection here? If this were a flight sim you can guarantee one of the planes would be piloted by the Churchill Insurance bulldog.



All references to prison escapades were dropped to placate the parents, and some twaddle about escaping the confines of an evil jukebox to arrive at their "first concert" supplants the plot. Where it gets *really* kooky is, you're exploring similar locations supposedly *inside* the jukebox that's gobbled you up, yet you're *entering other* jukeboxes at the end of each stage to *exit* the one you're trapped inside? Well whatever, it's a French game. I suppose not making much sense makes perfect sense.

Titus finally followed this up with Blues Brothers 2000 for the Nintendo 64 at the turn of the millennium, two years after the release of the movie it was intended to tie in with, before hanging up their pork pie hats for good in 2005 owing to bankruptcy.

It loosely piggybacks the gist of the movie's premise in that you intend to reform the troupe upon your release from prison to participate in a battle of the bands tournament,

only in the game you must *escape*. It's a 3D Mario 64 style adventure with rhythm and multi-player components requiring you to beat up opponents, dodge obstacles, collect a menagerie of power-ups and round up the waifs and strays that comprise your crew. Teaching the Blues Brothers basic dance moves is a soul-destroying affair, yet otherwise, it's not a *terrible* entry to conclude the series with.

Upon Titus's demise, the ownership of their IP passed to Interplay Entertainment. Somewhere in France there's a tombstone with Titus's name on it. The epitaph reads, "hmm, they were alright I suppose".